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## A CONFEDERATE DIPLOMAT AT THE COURT OF NAPOLEON III.

IN John Slidell of Louisiana the Confederacy possessed its ablest diplomatic agent. Born in New York in 1793 of a family on marriage terms with some of the most distinguished of Northern leaders, including Commodore Perry of Lake Erie fame, Slidell had linked his entire personal and political fortunes with the Lower South. Here indeed was the land of promise for men of the Slidell type. The cotton-gin and a broadening European cotton market had transferred economic and political leadership from the Upper South to the Lower, and called forth a new type of American, the planter-businessman-politician.<sup>1</sup> Slidell was the incarnation of its requirements, and success had been his reward. In professional life, a lucrative law practice had rendered him well-to-do; in finance, a penchant for railway promotion had made him the rival in that domain of Stephen A. Douglas and Jefferson Davis; and in politics, the increasing recognition of his varied powers had brought him forward as a national figure long before Secession called him into its service.

To this training in practical affairs, growing out of a varied and active career, Slidell added a special experience in diplomacy. For he had already served in 1845 and 1846 as the unofficial agent of President Polk for extending the boundaries of the Cotton Kingdom by peaceful purchase from Mexico.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, as senator from Louisiana, from December, 1853, to February, 1861, he was once more, in some sense, a diplomat, the representative of his state and section at Washington, then the firing line of Southern interests—rare training indeed in the ways of men and governments.

When, therefore, in 1861, the Southern States needed to be represented abroad by persons not only of convictions, but of experience, Slidell's record made him the logical man for the most difficult and at the same time the most hopeful post in Europe.

With his friend, Senator James M. Mason of Virginia, he accordingly set out; Slidell for Paris, Mason for London. The adven-

<sup>1</sup> For the best summary description of life in this great section, see William E. Dodd's *The Cotton Kingdom* (1919).

<sup>2</sup> For an account of this mission, see the author's "Slidell's Mission to Mexico", in the *South Atlantic Quarterly*, January, 1913.

tures of the two, their arrival at Cuba, departure on the *Trent*, seizure by Wilkes, detention near Boston, and release on British intercession, are not a part of the present story, which concerns rather the vicissitudes of hope and despair which marked their mission abroad. These oscillations of emotion are revealed in the correspondence of the two commissioners more clearly than in any other source now available. Unfortunately, the Slidell papers have been destroyed, but Mason preserved copies of his own letters, as well as something like a hundred letters from his colleague, constituting altogether as valuable a record as the war has left of the thoughts of two of the most active and intelligent men who ever threatened the permanence of the American system. It is with Slidell's share in this correspondence that the present paper is primarily concerned. Its object is, without pretending to relate the whole history of Confederate diplomacy in Europe, to show what contribution toward the making of that history may be derived from this one source, recently made available to the student.<sup>3</sup>

In the first letter of the series, written from Paris on February 5, 1862, Slidell admits to Mason that "recognition [of the Confederacy] may long be delayed but I am very sanguine as to the speedy breaking up of the blockade".<sup>4</sup> He counted much on the friendly disposition of the French authorities, and was proportionately disappointed at the coldness of his first reception by M. Thouvenel, the minister of foreign affairs. Thouvenel denied that his government had been in correspondence with Great Britain concerning the blockade, and "his denial . . . was so categorical and unqualified", says Slidell, "that I was obliged to believe it, but conversations with other officials have since led me to doubt it".<sup>5</sup> The Minister of the Interior, Persigny, a close friend of the Emperor, was more cordial than Thouvenel,<sup>6</sup> and Slidell set store upon his good offices and those of the President of the Council of State, M. Baroche,<sup>7</sup> whose son had previously been placed under obligations to the Slidells for hospitality extended during a visit to New Orleans.<sup>8</sup> The Minister of Finance, M. Fould,<sup>9</sup> also was among those who gave Slidell an early

<sup>3</sup> Mason Papers, Library of Congress, acquired in 1912. Many despatches of Slidell to the Confederate Secretaries of State are printed in vol. II. of Richardson's *Messages and Papers of the Confederacy*, though the lack of a table of contents makes them hard to pursue.

<sup>4</sup> Feb. 5, 1862.

<sup>5</sup> Feb. 12, 1862.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> See letter of Feb. 5, 1862.

<sup>9</sup> Feb. 12, 1862.

audience. His conclusion from conversations with these men and others was, February 12, that "the Emperor's sympathies are with us—that he would immediately raise the blockade and very soon recognize us, if England would only make the first step, however small, in that direction, but for the present at least he is decided that she shall take the initiative".<sup>10</sup> His French friends told Slidell that they had no wish to be the cat in the fable and to draw out chestnuts for British benefit.

Slidell had a faculty for facing facts, and his first estimate of Napoleon's intentions proved to be final. Napoleon's friendly advances were always forestalled of fruition by British reluctance to co-operate, and ultimately by Confederate reverses which intensified the risks of interference by outsiders. The first of these disappointments came to Slidell in March, 1862. Notwithstanding the autocracy of the emperor, the Corps Législatif was in some measure a barometer of opinion, at least to the extent that many of the speakers drew their inspiration from the imperial fountain, and Slidell watched its debates upon the American blockade with a passionate interest. In a speech delivered March 13, 1862, by M. Billault, a government spokesman in the Chamber, he heard the knell of French intervention. The cause he correctly traced to Confederate defeats. "If instead of the defeats at Roanoke and Donelson, we could have had some decisive victory to announce to the world, I believe that a very different view would have been taken by Mr. Billault. As it is I can only look forward with hope not unmingled with anxiety, to the news which we must soon have of an important battle at or near Nashville."<sup>11</sup>

The entire month was a period of the most anxious suspense. It confirmed Slidell's impression that Napoleon would do nothing without England, being "determined to hold on to her alliance on any terms which she might dictate".<sup>12</sup> He asked Mason for a frank statement of the London situation, for if nothing was to be hoped from Palmerston and Russell, "the sooner our people know that we have nothing to expect from this side of the water and that we must rely exclusively on our own resources, the better".<sup>13</sup>

Before another two weeks renewed negotiations between Napoleon and England lifted Slidell out of the slough of despond, and he wrote Mason in a totally different vein:

<sup>10</sup> Feb. 12, 1862.

<sup>11</sup> Mar. 14, 1862.

<sup>12</sup> Mar. 28, 1862.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

I have at last some good news to give you. Mr. Lindsay has had a long interview with the Emperor, who is prepared to act at once decidedly in our favor. he has always been ready to do so and has twice made representations to England, but has received evasive responses. He has now for the third time given them but in a more decided tone. Mr. Lindsay will give you all the particulars. This is entirely confidential, but you can say to Lord Campbell, Mr. Gregory etc. that I now have positive and *authentic* evidence that France only waits the assent of England for recognition and other more cogent measures.<sup>14</sup>

But these approaches of Napoleon were unofficial. With characteristic subterfuge, he acted through the Englishman, Lindsay, rather than through his own ambassador at London. Earl Russell refused to negotiate outside of regular channels, and Napoleon's third move shared the fate of his former efforts. Lindsay told his story, however, to Disraeli, and from him gained what promised to be a new light on the situation. Disraeli declared that Lord Russell was bound by a secret agreement with Mr. Seward not to break the blockade, and not to recognize the Confederacy. But Disraeli hinted that this agreement was irksome to Russell, and that if Napoleon himself would only take the lead, British opinion would support him so strongly that Lord Russell would be obliged, with only pretended reluctance, to give way in order to avoid a change of ministry.<sup>15</sup>

Napoleon was not too well pleased with Lindsay's report of the reception of his overtures.<sup>16</sup> He recollected his former grievance at Lord Russell's conduct in forwarding copies of French official representations on American affairs to Lord Lyons, who in turn communicated them to Mr. Seward. But he seized upon the explanation of the Russell-Seward agreement, and was half inclined to act upon Disraeli's advice, on the principle that "he could not consent that his people should continue to suffer from the action of the Federal government".<sup>17</sup> A friendly appeal might suffice, especially if accompanied by a naval demonstration on the American coast. But action had better await the naval decision at New Orleans, whose capture Napoleon did not anticipate, but must take into possible account. All this in confidence.

Characteristically Machiavellian was the scheme which Napoleon at this time evolved to make his future course toward the American question appear like a response to public demand. "Measures have

<sup>14</sup> Apr. 12, 1862.

<sup>15</sup> Summary of despatch no. 6, J. Slidell to Hon. J. P. Benjamin, secretary of state, Apr. 18, 1862.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

been taken," says Slidell in his report to the Department of State at Richmond, "to procure petitions from the Chambers of Commerce of the principal cities, asking the intervention of the Emperor to restore commercial relations with the Southern States."<sup>18</sup>

Editorial comment in the semi-official journals *Constitution*, *Patrie*, and *Pays*<sup>19</sup> coincided with reports that, with the exception of M. Thouvenel, the entire cabinet favored a vigorous American policy. And even more reassuring was a burst of activity in the Mediterranean fleet, which was ordered to lay in stores for three months. All in all, in the closing days of April, 1862, Slidell had reason for contentment. "I am not without hope," he wrote Mason, "that the Emperor may act alone."<sup>20</sup>

Even the fall of New Orleans failed to dispel the illusion of cheer. On May 2, Persigny gave Slidell definite assurance that the Confederacy would soon be recognized,"—this between ourselves—as he talks to me very unreservedly and relies on my discretion".<sup>21</sup> Even Thouvenel relaxed under the new geniality, and confided to Slidell that Mercier, who had gone on Napoleon's behalf to investigate conditions in the Confederacy, had made a favorable report as to Southern resources and determination. To Thouvenel's query upon the significance of the loss of New Orleans, Slidell was obliged to own that "it would be most disastrous, as it would give the enemy the control of the Mississippi and all its tributaries, but that it would not in any way modify the fixed purpose of our people to carry on the war even to our own extermination".<sup>22</sup> Slidell on his side pressed an inquiry into Thouvenel's views as to Lord Palmerston's assertion that British and French policies were identical. Thouvenel evaded the answer by saying that French action had been purely verbal.<sup>23</sup> The interview was, on the whole, satisfactory to Slidell, though a warning that only great Confederate victories at Corinth or in Virginia would warrant European recognition should have impressed him as ominous.

On the sixteenth of May, Slidell received fresh intimations of the emperor's good intentions—these from M. Billault, whose March speech had caused him such anxiety. "He assures me," writes Slidell, "that the Emperor and all the ministers are favorable to our

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Apr. 28, 1862.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> May 3, 1862.

<sup>22</sup> May 14, 1862.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* A part of this letter is printed in Richardson, *Messages and Papers of the Confederacy*, II. 251.

cause, have been so for the last year and are now quite as warmly so as they have been. Mr. Thouvenel is of course excepted, but even he has no hostility."<sup>24</sup> The darker side of the picture was that Billault, in contradiction to Thouvenel, declared that the emperor was far from satisfied with Mercier's visit to Richmond.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile McClellan's Peninsular Campaign was in full progress, and Slidell looked for the capture of Richmond. "Things look gloomy," he admitted to Mason, "but if we can repulse the enemy before Richmond and hold it (of which I feel by no means confident) and Beauregard defeat Halleck, I think that we will have a good prospect of early recognition. Even if we abandon Richmond retiring in good order beyond James River and we achieve a decided victory in the neighborhood of Corinth, I shall entertain hopes of being recognised."<sup>26</sup> He suggested to Mason that it would be well for both, in the event of a military success in either quarter, to act in concert in a demand for immediate recognition.

But such a plan involved a number of objections. The governments of Great Britain and France were not equally friendly to the Southern cause. Joint action might be premature. On the other hand, too early a demand upon Paris might isolate London completely. The difficulties a battling confederation would have in forcing recognition from unwilling powers were really insuperable, and Slidell fell back into the pessimism from which the promises of Napoleon had temporarily lifted him. "I am heartily tired and disgusted," he complains, "with my position here and so far as I am personally concerned, if our recognition is to be indefinitely postponed, I would very much prefer to bring my mission to an immediate close, but of course I must remain at my post however disagreeable, until authorised by the President to withdraw."<sup>27</sup> In these views of Slidell upon the desirability of action or a prompt withdrawal from Europe, Mason concurred.<sup>28</sup>

But new issues arose to make a permanent residence desirable, even in default of recognition. Of these, one was Mexico. Slidell's first reference to Mexican developments was in an outline to Mason of a projected letter to Thouvenel. "I am inclined . . . to touch upon the Mexican question, saying that while foreign occupation of that country would excite the most violent opposition at the North, we, far from sharing such a feeling, would be pleased to see

<sup>24</sup> May 16, 1862.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> May 27, 1862.

<sup>27</sup> June 1, 1862.

<sup>28</sup> See Slidell, June 6, 1862.

a steady, respectable, responsible government established there soon."<sup>29</sup>

Distance did not blind Slidell to the vast significance of the military decisions pending East and West, and in the middle of June he again sounded Mason on the proper course for each to pursue when the victory should be heralded. To Slidell, London looked like the most promising field for an aggressive demand.<sup>30</sup> He regarded Russell as the chief obstacle in the Confederate path, but felt that a formal demand, backed by a victorious army, might induce even him to yield to the policy of Palmerston and the other members of the cabinet. If, however, Great Britain showed a disposition to mediate between North and South, "it would perhaps be better to postpone the demand for formal recognition as such an offer would be virtually to recognize us".<sup>31</sup>

To Billault Slidell expressed himself as favoring recognition far rather than mediation,<sup>32</sup> saying "that it was impossible to overestimate the importance of such a step, that if it had been taken last summer the war would long since have terminated. That the same effect would now follow in a few months, it would give courage to the peace party at the North to speak out in time to operate upon the approaching Congressional elections".<sup>33</sup> Billault, however, gave Slidell no encouragement to think that recognition would soon be forthcoming, and reiterated that French determination to act only in concurrence with England was unchanged. He recommended him to consult Thouvenel once more,<sup>34</sup> and admitted that the Southern attitude toward French intervention in Mexico might have an influence upon the question of recognition, the more so as Slidell took occasion to renew his assurances "that all we desired there was the establishment of a respectable and responsible government and were quite indifferent as to its form, and that he was well aware that such were not the sentiments of the Washington government".<sup>35</sup>

Hope deferred was making the heart sick, and on June 21 Slidell unburdened himself in a very correct analysis of events. He put no confidence in Lord Palmerston. Disraeli and Walpole were well intentioned but futile. There was no use in applying to Thouvenel.

<sup>29</sup> June 6, 1862.

<sup>30</sup> June 14, 1862.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> June 17, 1862.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*



I have seen enough since I have been here to be convinced that nothing that I can say or do will advance for a single day the action of this government, and I am very much inclined to tender my resignation: The position of our representatives in Europe is painful and almost humiliating. it might be tolerated if they could be consoled by the reflection that their presence was in any way advantageous to their cause, but I am rather disposed to believe that we would have done better to withdraw after our first interviews with Russell and Thouvenel.<sup>36</sup>

More patiently, but no more optimistically, he wrote a few days later, "I think that it is now more evident than ever that England will do nothing that may offend the Lincoln government, and I shall await, as patiently as I can, the course of events."<sup>37</sup> Five months of his mission had expired, and Slidell had made little progress. In the social world, he was obtaining a recognition that was soon to result in an acquaintance and even a friendship with the emperor. In the political, he was pitted against forces too mighty for even the most adroit of diplomats to overcome.

These forces, nevertheless, seemed for the moment to favor Slidell when McClellan's withdrawal from Richmond admitted the failure of the Peninsular Campaign. He wrote Mason to reassure him of Napoleon's good-will. "I hear that the attempt is renewed to excite the impression in England that the Emperor is not disposed to recognise us and that the hitch is here, not at London. You can run no risk in giving any such report a most emphatic contradiction."<sup>38</sup> Persigny gave him once more to understand that intervention was imminent. But he realized the difficulty of Mason's position because of Palmerston's recent display of strength in Parliament. "Indeed that august body seems to be as much afraid of him, as the urchins of a village school of the birch of their pedagogue."<sup>39</sup>

At last, in July, 1862, came an interview with the emperor. Slidell had won the confidence of the emperor's friends. It remained for him to bring Napoleon himself into the circle of his influence. The improved military position of the Confederacy doubtless had its share in bringing about a meeting. It took place at Vichy.<sup>40</sup> Napoleon was apparently somewhat noncommittal in respect to Slidell's demand for immediate action, but gave Slidell to understand that his heart was in the right place. The interview lasted seventy min-

<sup>36</sup> June 21, 1862.

<sup>37</sup> June 29, 1862.

<sup>38</sup> July 11, 1862.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> July 16, 1862.

utes and was marked by extreme graciousness on the emperor's part.

He talked freely, frankly and unreservedly, spoke in the most decided terms of his sympathy and his regret that England had not shared his views. He said that he had made a great mistake in respecting a blockade which had for six months at least not been effective, that we ought to have been recognised last summer while our ports were still in our own possession. He spoke freely of the Mexican question and of the probability of its soon bringing him into collision with the U. S. That the treaty with Mexico if ratified by the Senate would place them virtually in a hostile position towards him. He asked if he offered mediation how the question of boundaries could be settled? What we would insist on? I said that we would insist on all the States where a majority of the people had already determined by their votes to join our Confederacy, leaving the people of Kentucky, Missouri, and Maryland to decide for themselves whether they would or would not unite their fortunes with ours. He expressed his regret that he had not been able sooner to see me and on parting said that he hoped for the future I should have less difficulty in seeing him.

On the whole he left on my mind the impression that if England long persisted in her inaction, he would be disposed to act without her, although of course he did not commit himself to do so. He said that he had reason not to be well satisfied with England, she had not appreciated as she should have done his support in the Trent affair. There is an important part of our conversation that I will give you through Mr. Mann. On the whole my interview was highly satisfactory. I have as yet made no mention of my having seen the Emperor but to his very confidential friends. I prefer that it should be known through other channels and as yet I have seen no notice of it in the papers.<sup>41</sup>

Armed with fresh confidence after these expressions of imperial favor, Slidell soon sought a fresh interview with Thouvenel, who had been kept in ignorance of the meeting at Vichy. Thouvenel discouraged any immediate demand for recognition, but indicated the right procedure if Slidell was determined to act, giving him to understand that no reply could be expected until some time after he himself had returned from Germany, where he was going for a ten days' absence.<sup>42</sup>

Mason meanwhile was pressing similar demands upon Lord Russell, and Slidell felt the most anxious solicitude as to their reception. "If the present moment be not opportune (to use his favorite phrase), I can imagine no possible contingency short of recognition by Lincoln that will satisfy his Lordship."<sup>43</sup> He wished each negotiation, however, to stand upon its own merits, and urged Mason to secrecy regarding the manoeuvres at Paris, which were apparently going well, for "I received yesterday a letter from Mr. Persigny

<sup>41</sup> July 20, 1862.

<sup>42</sup> July 23, 1862.

<sup>43</sup> July 30, 1862.

who had been to Vichy since I saw the Emperor. He writes most encouragingly."<sup>44</sup> Contact with the emperor led to overconfidence. And Slidell wrote on August 3, when suspense over Russell's decision was growing unbearable, "It seems to me impossible that Russell can be acting in concert with this government, and if he has undertaken to solve the question for England without full consultation and understanding with France, I should be *very much* surprised and disappointed if the Emperor do not take the matter in hand on 'his own hook'".<sup>45</sup>

Again Lord Russell refused to sanction these unofficial moves of Napoleon, giving as his reason the existence of a strong Union party at the South. Slidell's indignation at this matched the seriousness of the decision. He suggested to Mason that England's failure to move was due to the fact "that they desire to see the North entirely exhausted and broken down and that they are willing in order to attain that object to suffer their own people to starve, and play the poltroon in the face of Europe".<sup>46</sup> There was still room for hope that Russell had acted without consultation, that Napoleon would resent the rebuff, and that action by France alone might be the result. If so, "Russell's prompt reply ought not to be regretted. France will for us be a safer ally than England."<sup>47</sup> That this would prove to be the case seemed undeniable to Persigny, but Slidell had begun to discount the latter's over-sanguine temperament. "He is very enthusiastic," Slidell wrote to Mason, "and I am not as confident as he appears to be."<sup>48</sup> Action at this juncture was in any event made more doubtful, in Slidell's judgment, by the movements of Garibaldi.<sup>49</sup> Events in Italy would require the full attention of Europe, and would militate against Confederate hopes. Very curious testimony this to the influence of one liberal movement in aiding another oceans away!

Concern at the indifference of England, the timidity of France, and the tumult of Italy did not, however, move Slidell to hold out the olive branch to the Federal government. He tells Mason of a chance which the Duc de Morny, intimate of the emperor, afforded him to talk to Seward through the medium of a Frenchman known to be in communication with Washington upon the subject of a peace by reconciliation and reconstruction. "You may be assured, in no

<sup>44</sup> July 30, 1862.

<sup>45</sup> Aug. 3, 1862.

<sup>46</sup> Aug. 6, 1862.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

measured terms," he writes, "of the scorn with which such a proposition would be received."<sup>50</sup>

But if in America the bridge was already burned, in France it was desirable to keep open all avenues of communication. Chief of these was a confidential intercourse with the Foreign Office. Thus it was a real service which a friend at the Foreign Office did Slidell in giving him a chance to signify his wish for a delayed reply concerning his demand upon Thouvenel for recognition of the Confederacy. "If made it would be merely dilatory, probably more amicable in its tone than Russell's but arriving at the same conclusion."<sup>51</sup> Only the actual withdrawal of McClellan from the Peninsula would warrant Slidell in pressing Thouvenel for an immediate reply. And in any event such a reply must await the emperor's return from Chalons or Biarritz.<sup>52</sup> This in the event of good news. If the news proved bad, an immediate withdrawal from Paris might be advisable. Meanwhile "the affairs of Italy are giving great uneasiness and with all the Emperor's desire to get rid of his English commitments, he can do nothing until Garibaldi is disposed of".<sup>53</sup>

Two weeks later affairs were in much the same state. Slidell felt that the iron was hot to strike and that failure to gain recognition in 1862 would leave "no reason to hope for any favorable action here until we shall have ceased to desire it".<sup>54</sup> But the usual alteration of mood soon came to his relief. Lee's first invasion of Maryland was raising high hopes, and Slidell allowed himself some roseate dreams of victories to come. McClellan was to attack Lee and be defeated. Philadelphia was scheduled for capture, and Washington would lie at the Confederate mercy. But in Slidell's opinion it would be unwise to enter the capital, for "if we do we ought to destroy the public buildings and that might produce a bad impression in Europe".<sup>55</sup>

At the same time with Lee's advance, came the first overtures for the Confederate cotton loan. "I have been quite surprised," Slidell declares, "at an uninvited suggestion on the part of a respectable banking house of a disposition to open a credit to our government of a considerable amount. No distinct proposition as to the terms or amount, but the basis to be cotton to be delivered to the parties making the advance at certain ports in the interior."<sup>56</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Aug. 20, 1862.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Sept. 12, 1862.

<sup>55</sup> Sept. 26, 1862.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

Slidell felt disposed, in default of specific instructions, to assume responsibility for carrying through the projected loan on the basis of his general powers, subject to concurrence by Mason in the terms arranged. "Pray let me hear from you at once on the subject as I intend to see them again on Monday."<sup>57</sup> The cup of joy was pretty full. A much-needed loan was broached, and better still (September 30), it seemed once more as if recognition would not be long deferred. This from Thouvenel, the quondam skeptic. But once again a string was tied. Nothing could be done before the emperor's return.<sup>58</sup>

On October 14, 1862, Slidell was at *qui vive*. A ministerial council at St. Cloud would decide next day the course of French policy, and recognition ought to be officially agreed upon in time for communication to England before the twenty-third.<sup>59</sup> On the seventeenth he knew the worst. The Roman question had produced a cabinet rupture. Thouvenel resigned; Drouyn de Lhuys took his portfolio; "and for the time our question has been lost sight of"<sup>60</sup> A complete reorganization of the cabinet was averted only by the personal intervention of the emperor. All eyes were upon Italy. The Confederacy might wait.

The political deadlock did not interfere, however, with the negotiations over the cotton loan. On October 29 Slidell took Mason more completely into his confidence on this head. He named the Erlangers as the principals, representing them as "one of the richest and most enterprising banking houses of Europe, having extensive business relations throughout France and free access to some very important men about the Court. They will in anticipation of the acceptance of their propositions actively exert themselves in our favor and enlist in the scheme persons who will be politically useful."<sup>61</sup> Slidell advised acceptance of their terms, subject to possible modifications, and completed his budget of good news with information that Napoleon was exerting himself to bring Russia as well as England into a proposal for a six months' armistice, North and South, "with our ports open to all the world",<sup>62</sup> a project the more likely of success because of the support of King Leopold, who was believed to have much influence with his niece, Queen Victoria. "The Emperor thinks that his counsels will have great influence and

<sup>57</sup> Sept. 26, 1862.

<sup>58</sup> Oct. 2, 1862.

<sup>59</sup> Oct. 14, 1862.

<sup>60</sup> Oct. 17, 1862.

<sup>61</sup> Oct. 29, 1862.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

perhaps Lord Palm<sup>n</sup>, when he finds the Queen with us, may be willing to act."<sup>63</sup>

Reverting to the loan, Slidell evidently feared that Mason might balk at the terms it contemplated, for he urged repeatedly that the final decision would rest not with them, but at Richmond, "while in the meanwhile the mere anticipation or hope rather of their acceptance will be useful here".<sup>64</sup>

In politics, Slidell so far misread the Russian temper as to believe that Napoleon's advances would meet a favorable response, "perhaps with some reservation".<sup>65</sup> It was unfortunate, to be sure, that Captain Maury, who had been selected for St. Petersburg, had not been appointed earlier. "We should have had an agent there long since."<sup>66</sup>

Slidell's correspondence for the year 1862 comes to an end with these reflections upon Russia,<sup>67</sup> with a belief that France was on the point of demanding a cessation of the war in the interest "of humanity not only in America but in Europe",<sup>68</sup> and with a suggestion that army contractors and armament makers would prove useful if properly approached.<sup>69</sup>

The year had been one of immense activity, anxiety, and, in view of a cause predoomed to failure, of achievement. Many wires had been pulled, many friends recruited, and much pressure brought to bear toward recognition, the great object of the mission. In a sense, Slidell's achievements in Paris were the counterpart of the military situation at home. It too was foreordained to failure, but the year 1862 closed with what appeared to many minds as an even chance for victory.

Appeals for recognition and details of the cotton loan occupied Slidell in the opening days of 1863. It was reassuring to be told by Persigny that

Mr. Drouyn de L'Huys wrote to Mr. Mercier last week instructing him to make an earnest appeal for a cessation of hostilities and to suggest at all events a conference between the parties belligerent even without an armistice. Mr. Dayton was informed of the instructions and did not remonstrate against them. Mr. Drouyn is now heartily engaged in the matter and Mr. Persigny is confident that if Lincoln refuses to act on the suggestion made by him, recognition will immediately follow.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Oct. 1 (erroneous date for Nov. 1), 1862.

<sup>65</sup> Nov. 14, 1862.

<sup>66</sup> Nov. 28, 1862.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Oct. 1 (*i. e.*, Nov. 1), 1862.

<sup>69</sup> Dec. 6, 1862.

<sup>70</sup> Jan. 21, 1863.

Again the exuberance of Persigny required to be discounted, for Slidell's next account of the instructions to Mercier admits that they were conciliatory to a degree, carefully avoiding "anything calculated to excite Yankee susceptibility".<sup>71</sup> But it was something to have enlisted the active co-operation of Drouyn de Lhuys.

The affair of the loan came, meanwhile, to a head, and on February 3, 1863, Slidell was able to announce its consummation, but not the particulars. Not so the arrangement for a peace conference: Slidell learned through his friend at the Foreign Office on February 10 that while Seward favored an armistice, Lincoln was "determined to carry on the war at all hazards",<sup>72</sup> and Dayton, who had been passive when a conference between the belligerents was first proposed, now exerted himself in protest against French intervention.<sup>73</sup> But Slidell was hopeful that French policy would adhere to its new programme, and trusted to the emperor's forthcoming speech to the Chambers to "say something significant about our affairs".<sup>74</sup> French assistance was then the chief hope, because it had soon become apparent that nothing was to be anticipated from King Leopold's influence at the British court.<sup>75</sup>

By the fifteenth, Slidell was in a position to announce the terms of the cotton loan. It called for £3,000,000 seven per cent. bonds at 77 per cent., "convertible into cotton at 6 *d.* deliverable within six months after peace at a port".<sup>76</sup> This was highly satisfactory to Erlanger, though it might seem a hard bargain to the Confederacy.

In default of recognition, which continued to be the rainbow of illusion, Slidell reverted to the blockade issue.

I shall not make it matter of formal communication [he wrote Mason], but will endeavor to induce this government to reconsider the whole question of blockade. All here admit that a gross error has been committed in recognising the efficiency of the blockade and only desire to find some plausible pretext for retracing the false steps. The evidence of the repeated intermissions of the blockade at many points and for several days which I presented was conclusive, the voluntary relaxation of the blockade offered in my opinion much stronger grounds for declaring it inefficient than its temporary suspension from 'force majeure'.<sup>77</sup>

On this point, nevertheless, as on almost all others, Slidell's hopes were doomed to disappointment, for Drouyn de Lhuys informed him

<sup>71</sup> Jan. 25, 1863.

<sup>72</sup> Feb. 11, 1863.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Feb. 15, 1863.

<sup>77</sup> Feb. 19, 1863. See also Mar. 1, 1863.

that France was already too far committed in recognition of the blockade for her to withdraw without the co-operation of England. "He asked me however to write him an informal note on the subject, when he would carefully examine it."<sup>78</sup> Here of course was the trouble. Such examination only demonstrated the folly of action. And of the blockade, as well as of the war, France continued but a passive spectator.

The only avenue for really constructive developments lay in semi-official and private negotiations with ship contractors. And 1863, in France as in England, was a year of activity in this direction. The cotton loan made ship-building possible. And Slidell soon turned his attention to this auxiliary development of his mission. "We can not only build ships here but arm and equip them. I am only waiting to know with tolerable certainty the success of the loan to suggest to Capt'n. Maury the expediency of coming over here, where I have no doubt he can build on as good terms as in England, but will have no difficulty in carrying his ship to sea."<sup>79</sup>

In the more diplomatic sphere of Slidell's mission, one excuse after another arose for French delay. In 1862 it was Garibaldi and Italy. In 1863 the troubles in Poland occupied the stage, and Slidell, in a refrain grown almost habitual, observes that "Until the Polish imbroglio is settled I do not hope that anything will be done here in our affairs".<sup>80</sup>

The world of European politics thus complicated a task already diversified enough. Recognition, intervention, recall of the blockade, ship-building, and the cotton loan made in themselves a fairly formidable programme for an agent not officially recognized. And already in April, 1863, the problem of Confederate credit had arisen. The bonds, now on the market, had declined three or four points;<sup>81</sup> Spence, the English agent, feared a drop of fifteen; and stock-exchange operations to bolster the bonds were already a subject of discussion. Slidell displayed on this economic subject, as well as upon the more strictly diplomatic questions in his purview, a strong acumen.

I do not see at present [he declares] any sufficient motive for buying on acct. of our government, but the time may arrive before the settling day when it may be good policy to do so. In the meanwhile, I think it would be well to agree that the amount of the loan should be reduced to two millions with the privilege however of taking the other million

<sup>78</sup> Feb. 23, 1863.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> Mar. 15, 1863.

<sup>81</sup> Apr. 5, 1863.



within some fixed delay. This would leave very little floating scrip for the operators for a fall to work on.<sup>82</sup>

Along with these sound ideas on conservative policy, are revealed some details of the loan which betray their writer's familiarity with high finance. He mentions that if the sales go badly the Erlangers have the option of withdrawing from the entire transaction, by a payment to the Confederacy of £300,000, but says, "I have no idea that under any circumstances they will take this ground, for they would be very heavy losers, having as they inform me expended large sums in conciliating certain interests and influences."<sup>83</sup>

Mason's arrangements for price-bolstering were successful for the time being, and on the thirteenth, Slidell anticipated an early premium of five or six per cent.<sup>84</sup> His own affair of the ship-building also gave favorable prospect of success, involving as it did direct permission of the emperor, who alone can be alluded to in the following: "B[ulloch] is about making contract to be binding only when I shall have recd. assurance from the *highest* source that he can use the articles when ready."<sup>85</sup>

Slidell in turn made himself useful to Napoleon by providing him with evidence of Yankee shipments of arms to the Mexican government. This, he told Mason, he had secured through "the recklessness or stupidity of Mr. Charles Francis Adams".<sup>86</sup> The influence of these disclosures was not confined to Napoleon, for Slidell noted with satisfaction a new truculence in John Bull.<sup>87</sup> The time was nevertheless ill chosen, in Slidell's opinion, to press Great Britain for direct permission to export arms. He preferred to work through a neutral agency, and on April 27 made the following report to Mason: "I am now in treaty with the agent of a foreign government for an arrangement that will enable our ships to leave England armed and equipped without any danger of interruption. Capt'n. Bullock goes over to-morrow and he will give you full details. I am sure that you will consider the proposed arrangement as in every way desirable."<sup>88</sup>

Quite impossible achievements were anticipated of this new British-Confederate navy. Slidell even predicted that if the ships

<sup>82</sup> Apr. 5, 1863.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> April 13, 1863.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Apr. 22, 1863.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Apr. 27, 1863.

once got to sea, "we can open the Mississippi and retake New Orleans".<sup>89</sup>

In May, 1863, interest shifted from blockade-runners and Confederate cruisers back to the loan. Spence, the British agent for its flotation, was pessimistic, and rumors, which Slidell believed to be without foundation, concerning negotiations for a second loan, were injuring the confidence of "the City" in the first loan. On his own responsibility, Slidell denied that such a loan was in contemplation, but he had an uneasy suspicion that after all it might be. His anxiety was increased by an entire lack of confidence in Spence. "I am obliged to confess that I have no faith in Mr. S.'s judgment or business qualities, and am almost equally sceptical about his fair dealing or disinterestedness."<sup>90</sup>

From Spence himself, who claimed to have specific authorization from the Confederate Treasury for the negotiation of this new loan. Slidell demanded to see the instructions.<sup>91</sup> The reply was evasive. Spence spoke of rumor only, mentioned Oppenheim and Co. as the probable bankers, indicated \$100,000,000 in six per cent. bonds as the proposed sum, recounted his own efforts in the *Times* to bolster confidence in the cotton loan, admitted that this would be fatally jeopardized by such an issue as they were discussing, and concluded evasively without any reference to the supposed instructions, that "it is now better to wrap this matter entirely in oblivion for the present", taking especial care to keep it a secret from Erlanger and Co., who might, in an effort to extricate themselves from the cotton loan, only embarrass it further.<sup>92</sup>

This reply was far from satisfactory to Slidell. He not only noted its spirit of evasion, but objected to its assumption of authority in the expenditure as well as in the flotation of the loan. To Mason he wrote that "Spence appears to consider that the powers of Secy. of Navy as well as of Treasury are vested in him. I am getting heartily tired of his meddling."<sup>93</sup>

The consolation of Slidell's mission was that, although something or other was going wrong nearly all the time, not everything did so at once. In the same month of his anxiety over Spence and the loans, developments in Mexico freed Napoleon's hands, and augured well for a policy of intervention. "I am to have an audience with the Emperor on Friday," wrote Slidell, "from which I hope good

<sup>89</sup> May 6, 1863.

<sup>90</sup> May 8, 1863.

<sup>91</sup> May 10, 1863.

<sup>92</sup> Spence to Slidell, May 11, 1863.

<sup>93</sup> May 15, 1863.

results, as the recent successes in Mexico leave him freer to act than he was before. In the meanwhile [and here Slidell shows an attention to preparation and detail which marks the conscientious diplomat] pray endeavor to ascertain what will be the probable result of Mr. Roebuck's motion on the thirtieth and let me know. The motion will in all probability be alluded to by the Emperor."<sup>94</sup> But the interview came and passed, with intervention still a dream of the future, and Slidell thought it best to await the outcome of the French elections before making his next move.<sup>95</sup>

In June, 1863, while Lee was gathering his army for the mighty push towards Gettysburg, Slidell was quietly working on the shipping problem. He favored selling a certain vessel to Russia, in order to be in funds for the building of two others of a more suitable type, and he declared mysteriously that "Another advantage would result from the sale to Russia. it would give increased facilities to another operation you wot of."<sup>96</sup>

In the more conventional field of his negotiations he faced the old issue of procrastination. Napoleon's attitude of friendliness toward the Confederacy remained unchanged, but so did his disposition not to act without England. With a view to securing this co-operation, however, he had once more, June 22, sounded Palmerston, the emperor himself writing a note to his minister at London, Baron Gros, in which he used the words, "*je me demande s'il ne serait bien d'arester Lord Palmerston que je suis décidé à reconnaître le Sud*".<sup>97</sup> Slidell learned this through his confidential friend at the Foreign Office, and he allowed himself an exultation keener than any he had known since first he learned of Napoleon's friendly sentiments, keener, it may be added, than his previous disappointments should have countenanced. In his exuberance he wrote to Mason that

This is by far the most significant thing that the Emperor has said either to me or to others—it renders me comparatively indifferent what England may do or omit doing.

At all events, let Mr. Roebuck press his motion and make his statement of the Emperor's declarations. Lord Palmerston will not dare to dispute [and] the responsibility of the continuance of the war will rest entirely with him.<sup>98</sup>

Again everything led only to disappointment. Mr. Roebuck presented a motion which indicated no cognizance of the emperor's

<sup>94</sup> Another letter of the same date.

<sup>95</sup> May 23, 1863.

<sup>96</sup> June 26, 1863.

<sup>97</sup> June 29, 1863.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

intentions. But Slidell was disposed to acquit the emperor of any blame. "I am satisfied," he wrote Mason, "that he has kept his promise with good faith. Either the Minister of Foreign Affairs or Baron Gros or both have failed to carry out his instructions or Messrs. Russell and Layard have asserted what was false. *Perhaps* Lord Palmerston may have recd. the communication and failed to inform their [*sic*] colleagues of the fact. I hope that this may prove to be the fact."<sup>99</sup>

Gettysburg and the prospect of French intervention failed together. The high-water mark, both on the battlefield and in the field of diplomacy, had been reached. From that time on, the history of the Confederacy was that of a decline and fall. Nor was it otherwise with the Slidell mission. Occasional gleams of hope illumined the monotony of disappointment. But the realist could see only final despair. The true barometer of foreign aspirations lay in England. By September, Slidell was as gloomy over the lukewarm aid of friends as over the avowed antagonism of enemies. "Sir James Ferguson and Mr. Gregory in the debate on Roebuck's motion seemed to be as indisposed to recognize us as Russell and Bright. They give us fair words it is true, but beyond these we have nothing to expect of them."<sup>100</sup>

For such satisfaction as was to be gleaned, one was obliged to turn to social rather than to diplomatic life. In the *beau monde*, the Slidells were conspicuous. Slidell pictures their life at Paris with a justifiable pride at the position of his wife and family.

My family and I have been twice to the receptions of the Empress. She received Mrs. S. and the girls most graciously. At these parties men are not presented to her but at her request. On both occasions she sent for me. on the first she talked with me for more than 20 minutes. She is perfectly well posted about our affairs, and understands the question in all its bearings thoroughly. At my second visit she conversed probably 10 or 12 minutes and was very particular in inquiring about the siege of Charleston.

She sympathises most warmly with our cause and so expresses herself without any reserve. I mention these facts because the Empress is supposed, I believe with truth, to exercise considerable influence in public affairs. . . . I forgot to mention that the Emperor at the second reception of the Empress was present—he came to me and shook hands and conversed very cordially for several minutes.<sup>101</sup>

The correspondence with Mason apparently ceased in September, 1863, for the remainder of the year, so that Slidell's views upon the course of affairs in the autumn and winter are not available from

<sup>99</sup> July 9, 1863.

<sup>100</sup> Sept. 16, 1863.

<sup>101</sup> Biarritz, Sept. 16, 1863.

this source. It is not difficult to imagine, however, that the round of diplomatic calls continued to be engrossing, nerve-destroying, and fruitless, while in the world of society, the fascination of Paris brought the Slidells more and more under its spell. Certainly the busy record of the first two years leads one to believe that Slidell continued at his task, indefatigable and urbane, ready for every opportunity to advance the cause nearest his heart.

Communication, at any rate as far as the files are now preserved, was renewed in March, 1864. Slidell discusses with Mason some details of the naval war,<sup>102</sup> puts him on his guard against Fortunatus Crosby, formerly a consul at Geneva, now posing as a friend of the South, but more probably an emissary in the pay of Seward,<sup>103</sup> and denies the rumor that French intervention is imminent. He reports a very friendly interview with M. Drouyn de Lhuys in which the latter expressed his Southern sympathies with more than usual warmth, and intimated that Lord Palmerston also was full of admiration for the Confederacy and confident of its ability to maintain itself, information to this effect having come to the Foreign Office through a Frenchman high in the confidence of the emperor, who had been honored with a recent interview with the British premier.<sup>104</sup> Drouyn apparently did not feel entire confidence in the correctness of these statements, inasmuch as he urged Slidell himself to ascertain Lord Palmerston's intentions, a not very easy task, to be sure, but one which Slidell attempted to carry out through the assistance of Colonel Mann, in the supposed absence of Mr. Mason from London.<sup>105</sup>

Judging, however, from the course which the government actually pursued, the real views of M. Drouyn de Lhuys were far removed from those which he expressed to Slidell. To one of his colleagues he declared that the supposed renewal of negotiations between France and England tending toward a recognition of the Confederacy was "absolutely without foundation".<sup>106</sup> It was true that France and possibly Lord Palmerston also took a friendly attitude toward the Confederacy, but the time to manifest this was by no means opportune, more especially as Napoleon was as determined as ever not to act alone.<sup>107</sup>

Contradictions like these of Drouyn de Lhuys were becoming

<sup>102</sup> Mar. 6, 1864.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> Mar. 9, 1864.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> Mar. 13, 1864.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

familiar to Slidell, but in the present instance there was the added chagrin of the failure to secure a promised interview with the Archduke Maximilian, who was on the point of leaving for Mexico. Slidell's comment on this is bitter.

I have reason to believe that in declining to see me, he followed the advice of the Emperor influenced by Mercier saying that Lincoln had assured him that the Imperial government in Mexico would be recognised at Washington provided no negotiations were entered into with the Confederacy.

All this is very disgusting and I find it very difficult to keep my temper amidst all this double dealing. . . . This is a rascally world and it is most hard to say who can be trusted.<sup>108</sup>

Pious lamentations upon the world's duplicity did not prevent Slidell from contributing his mite toward the sum total thereof. Unable to see Maximilian directly, he worked upon the sympathies of General Wold, his aide-de-camp, and the only Frenchman in his suite, therefore the most likely of all to present the Confederate cause in a favorable light to the emperor. "I have talked to him very freely," writes Slidell, "as to the consequences that will result from a refusal to be on good terms with the Confederacy. He agrees with me fully and will have ample opportunity of impressing his views on the Archduke during the passage to Vera Cruz."<sup>109</sup>

These subterranean methods made the £500 received in June, 1864, for secret-service account a welcome addition to the \$1500 allowance for a contingent fund.<sup>110</sup> Perhaps it oiled an occasional cog at the Foreign Office and procured for him such gossip as "that the British Government has made definite overtures of energetic measures to curb the German governments and that they are favorably listened to here—my informant would not be surprised at a general European war this summer. he is very reliable. I give you this for what it is worth."<sup>111</sup>

The war had now dragged on into mid-1864. Its outcome was more and more dubious. The advantages which an early recognition by Europe might have won for the Confederacy were already forfeited. In Slidell's words,

the time has now arrived when it is comparatively of very little importance what Queen or Emperor may say or think about us. A plague I say on both your houses. I have an autograph letter of the Emperor to a friend, saying that he *had* given an *order* to let the *Rappahannock* go

<sup>108</sup> Mar. 13, 1864.

<sup>109</sup> Mar. 22, 1864.

<sup>110</sup> June 9, 1864.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

to sea. the letter is dated 7 inst. and yet the permission is still withheld by the Minister of Foreign Affairs.<sup>112</sup>

In default of material aid from France and Great Britain, Slidell was skeptical of the advantages to be derived from the moral aid of the Papacy. Thus, in December, 1864, when Sherman was well on his way to the sea, Slidell opposed the publication of a letter from Cardinal Antonelli, the papal secretary of state,

as it was much less decided in its tone than the Pope's letter to the President of Decr. 63. . . . Mr. Mann does not agree with me in opinion. he thinks the publication of Antonelli's note desirable. I am never very tenacious of my opinions unless in matters of very grave importance and this is not of that category.

Pray let me know what you think. if you agree with me I will write to Mann that I do not object to publishing the letter in Belgium but that I would rather that it should not appear in the London or the Paris papers.<sup>113</sup>

Mason sided with Mann, and Slidell yielded to their judgment.

In Slidell's mission, as in the affairs of the Confederacy at home, 1864 was a year of reverses. Less is heard of even the possibility of intervention. A possible break-up of the blockade is not once mentioned. Comments upon naval construction and the interpretation of the law of prizes<sup>114</sup> are pessimistic. Even in Mexico, where a ray of hope might be said to gleam, failure to establish a direct contact with Maximilian was disappointing. Such a weight of despair the polite nothings of Drouyn de Lhuys, the imaginary favor of Palmerston, and the conventional benedictions of Antonelli were by no means adequate to counterbalance. The hopes of the Confederacy were sinking.

Early in the new year came rumors of peace which to Slidell at first appeared incredible.

I am completely bewildered about the peace rumors<sup>115</sup> [he wrote]. I attached no importance to them until the news of Blair's return to Richmond. This indeed looks as if some serious negotiation were on foot, and yet I cannot conceive on what it can be based. From what point of departure can it commence? Our affairs have never appeared to be in a worse condition and it is difficult to imagine that Lincoln would now entertain the idea of separation which he has so long and so studiously rejected.

On the other hand, I cannot permit myself for a moment to suppose that President Davis would listen to any terms of which independence was not the indispensable preliminary condition. I have endeavored to get some information here but without success. are you better posted

<sup>112</sup> July 17, 1864.

<sup>113</sup> Dec. 16, 1864.

<sup>114</sup> See a letter of Dec. 18, 1864.

<sup>115</sup> Feb. 3, 1865.

than I? I have not written you for a long while, but I have had nothing to communicate and there has been little in the news from home to invite comment.<sup>116</sup>

But until peace became an actuality, Slidell's mission went on in its accustomed rut. Lord Russell continued to be the *bête noir*;<sup>117</sup> Mason continued to receive advice on the proper approaches to Lord Palmerston in the light of developments at Paris;<sup>118</sup> and agreeable but fruitless sessions with the emperor, his cabinet, and intimate friends, continued to absorb the time of Slidell.<sup>119</sup> An interview with Napoleon on March 5, 1865, brought him no nearer the goal than their first colloquy at Vichy in 1862. "My interview with the Emperor resulted as I supposed it would. He is willing and anxious to act with England but will not move without her."<sup>120</sup> And England had rejected his overtures too often to warrant the expectation that she would ever heed them. In fact, in the judgment of Napoleon, it was useless for Mason himself to press the issue further, until Beauregard should prove his ability to stop the northward progress of Sherman's army. This notwithstanding the fact that in other matters England was manifesting a disposition increasingly conciliatory toward Napoleon.<sup>121</sup>

Mason, it appears, had doubted the fact of the overtures to which Napoleon had alluded, for Slidell took occasion to remind him of Lord Palmerston's "implicit admission" to that effect.<sup>122</sup> It was in their last interchange of letters before Appomattox. A curious blindness to events and their significance obscured from Mason even the finality involved in Lee's surrender. He continued to hope against hope. The more practical mind of Slidell grasped the issue in its fullest bearings. His letter to Mason of April 26, 1865, is the swan-song of their mission.<sup>123</sup>

*My dear Sir.*

I cannot share your hopefulness. we have seen the beginning of the end. I for my part am prepared for the worst. With Lee's surrender there will soon be an end of our regularly organised armies and I can see no possible good to come from a protracted guerilla warfare. We are crushed and must submit to the yoke. our children must bide their time for vengeance, but you and I will never revisit our homes under

<sup>116</sup> Feb. 3, 1865.

<sup>117</sup> Feb. 14, 1865.

<sup>118</sup> Mar. 5, 1865.

<sup>119</sup> Mar. 5, 6, 1865.

<sup>120</sup> Mar. 6, 1865.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> Mar. 22, 1865.

<sup>123</sup> Apr. 26, 1865.



our glorious flag. For myself I shall never put my foot on a soil over which flaunts the hated stars and stripes.

I went yesterday to the Foreign Affairs but Mr. C. had already left his office. I have sent Eustis [his secretary of legation] to make the inquiries you desired and shall keep my letter open to give you the result—but before you receive this you will probably have another steamers news with Lincoln's program of pacification and reconstruction. I am sick, sick at heart.

Yours faithfully

JOHN SLIDELL.

Slidell's comments upon the assassination of Lincoln are not preserved in the files of his correspondence with Mason. But in the accession of Andrew Johnson he foresaw mischief. To Mason's suggestion that there were elements in the situation promising a new lease of life for the Confederacy, Slidell replied without enthusiasm. "I confess I can see no grounds for the hopes you entertain unless some drunken outbreak of Andy Johnson should induce Grant to take possession of the government and thus produce a civil war in the North. A few months, however, perhaps a few weeks, will decide which of us is right."<sup>124</sup>

The personal fortunes of Slidell declined with the cause for which he labored. The capture of New Orleans, followed by the confiscation of his property by the Union authorities, cut off his chief source of private income. He was obliged at that time to discontinue an annuity of \$600, previously paid to a maiden sister, and for his own wants to depend upon his salary as a commissioner. With the war at an end, this also terminated, though all arrears in salary were made good to him and Mason from a small unexpended balance of Confederate funds still in the hands of Fraser, Trenholm and Co., fiscal agents for the defunct government. Slidell accordingly gave up his expensive apartment and economized in various other ways. "I little thought," he wrote Mason, "when we left the Confederacy that the time could arrive when I should be compelled to make these calculations, but so it is and I trust that I bear the change with a considerable degree of philosophy."<sup>125</sup> That he was in some straits is clear enough from his decision to sell his library.<sup>126</sup> Yet his desire to realize upon all available assets proceeded not so much from immediate want as from a conviction that no more funds would ever be forthcoming from America. "We [Mr. Mason and I] are peculiarly situated," he reminded an English correspondent, "as we can have no expectation of ever returning

<sup>124</sup> May 1, 1865.

<sup>125</sup> May 29, 1865.

<sup>126</sup> July 26, 1865.

to our homes or recovering any of our property (our children may some day or other save something from the general wreck), for even if we were disposed to apply for grace, I cannot stomach the word pardon, no amnesty would be extended to us, certainly neither to Mr. Mason nor to me. Mr. Mann might possibly have some chance of being forgiven, but I have no idea he will make the experiment."<sup>127</sup>

There can be no doubt of Slidell's sincerity in desiring never again to set foot on American soil, but the interests of his children in the confiscated estates which he had meanwhile deeded to them caused him to humble his pride to the extent of applying to President Johnson in August, 1866, for permission to visit New Orleans. The communication was forwarded through the courtesy of John Bigelow, who had been Union chargé d'affaires at Paris throughout the war. Slidell is mindful of the dignity of the cause which he had represented, but with his usual perception of facts he does not disguise that he must now be the suppliant. The letter is notable.<sup>128</sup>

*Mr. President.*

I have for the last year been desirous to return, at least for a limited period, to the State of Louisiana, but have deferred asking permission to do so, believing that the policy which you intended to pursue towards persons situated as I am, had not yet been decided on by you, or if decided, that the time had not arrived for promulgating it. The condition of the world would now seem to authorise the hope that the day is not distant when that reserve will no longer be considered necessary.

My antecedents are known to you, and it would be worse than useless [to] trespass on your valuable time to recur more particularly to them. It may not however be improper for me to say, that since the month of May '65, I have without intruding my counsels on any one, invariably advised such ci-devant Confederates returning to their former homes as have thought fit to ask my opinion, to accept frankly the issue of the past struggle with all its legitimate consequences, the first of which I consider to be an unreserved submission to the authority of the government of the United States. With this brief explanation, I solicit permission to visit the State of Louisiana and respectfully ask to be informed on what conditions, if on any, I may be allowed to do so.

I have the honor to be with great respect

Your Mt. Obedt. Sr.

JOHN SLIDELL.

To the President of the United States,  
Washington.

I have thought it proper to send this letter unsealed through the Legation of the United States at Paris.

Four months having passed without reply, Slidell concluded that

<sup>127</sup> July 26, 1865.

<sup>128</sup> Aug. 6, 1866. Quoted in a letter to Mason, Oct. 7, 1866.

none was intended. He wrote an account of the whole episode to Mason, emphasizing that the proposed visit was solely in his children's interest, and reiterating his determination not to apply for a special pardon, though admitting his willingness to take advantage of any general pardon which might cover his case without the imposition of humiliating conditions.

For instance [he declared], I would not object to pledge myself to do no act hostile to the government of the U. S. for without any such pledge, I should discourage any attempt for a renewed movement, satisfied that our people have been too dreadfully crippled to make one successfully for many years. Nothing would induce me ever to become a citizen of the U. S. nor will any of my children, I trust, ever establish themselves there. Indeed could I return tomorrow to Louisiana, be elected by acclamation to the Senate and received without contradiction at Washington, I would shrink with disgust from any association with those who now pollute the Capitol.

One word of explanation—my declaration about advice given to Confederates returning to their homes is strictly correct, but I have never advised any so to return, who were not absolutely without means to reside abroad or the necessary qualities and connections to enable them to support themselves decently elsewhere, nor had leave been given to me to visit Louisiana would I have accepted it coupled with any other condition than a parole of honor to do nothing hostile to the government.<sup>129</sup>

Nevertheless when Mason found in 1869 that he was one of those who would be better off at home in Virginia, Slidell approved the move, and admitted that in similar circumstances he would have done the same.<sup>130</sup>

But having one daughter married in France and Mrs. Slidell with the two others having become not only accustomed to but satisfied with Parisian life—having no interest which could be advanced by my presence in America—feeling that I could not possibly render any service to any one or any cause at home, I have made up my mind to let the remainder of my days, in the course of nature it cannot be a long one, glide away quietly in Paris. There is no great hardship in this, for there is no spot on earth where the "dolce far niente" can be more fully enjoyed.<sup>131</sup>

He goes on to say that his son Alfred is leaving next day for New York to enter the bond business, and to acquire residence and citizenship as a step toward the prolonged litigation which would be involved in a recovery of the confiscated property in Louisiana. Thus reconstruction was weaving even so torn and shattered a thread as the Slidells into the woof of a new nation, and the mission

<sup>129</sup> Oct. 7, 1866.

<sup>130</sup> Nov. 3, 1869.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

of the emissary of Confederacy and disunion had come to its philosophical as well as its technical end.

In the fullness of reconstruction, scarcely begun in 1869, but a reality in 1920, it is fair to include Slidell in the calendar of distinguished American diplomats. Destiny called him to serve a section rather than a nation, at a time when the whole had lost all meaning to some of its parts. Yet Time with its healing touch has removed most of the agony of the period, leaving the outstanding figures of an heroic age to claim the homage of their countrymen, North and South. Among these, Slidell, always at his post of duty, moving heaven and earth to win friends for his cause, resolute to the end, and undaunted by its consequences, merits a place as one of the great Americans who, like Franklin, have pleaded an American issue before the bar of world opinion.

LOUIS MARTIN SEARS.